

NSC BRIEFING

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IRAQ AND MIDDLE EAST

- I. The pro-Western government of Iraq was overthrown by a military coup early this morning. Prime Minister Nuri Said and Crown Prince Abd al-Illah may have been assassinated. King Faysal, who was to fly to Istanbul for a Baghdad Pact meeting, is said to be under arrest.
- II. The coup action was taken by pro-Nasir elements, led by young army officers.
  - A. A "republican government of Iraq" has been proclaimed, with a cabinet of colonels and leftist civilians. Members of the Ba'ath party, which also spearheaded the pro-Nasir cause in Syria, appear to predominate among the civilian group.
    1. Pictures of Nasir are now on display "everywhere" in Baghdad.
  - B. The structure of the new regime is unclear. The formal head of state apparently is a Lieutenant General Kubai, who has been in touch with the Egyptians and had been suspected of disloyalty for some time. He was on a mission in the United States last year.
  - C. As of 0700 Baghdad time, the capital was reported by the US Embassy  to be relatively normal, with considerable jubilation among crowds moving past the embassy toward the center of the city.
    1. However, later reports state the regime has imposed a curfew and that tanks have been deployed to protect

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2. Baghdad radio has appealed to the populace to refrain from attacking foreign embassies or personnel.

III. King Husayn's government in Jordan is likely to be affected immediately--Cairo radio is reported to have asserted that action in Jordan had already begun.

A. Factional rivalries, disaffection and UAR-supported subversion within the army and government already posed serious security problems for Husayn.

B. In addition to recent arrests of some forty junior officers suspected of plotting with Syrian support to kill the King, several senior military and security officials, including the former deputy chief of staff, the national guard commander, and the Amman police chief, are suspected of disloyalty. The King's senior aide and chief of his palace intelligence organization, Radi Abdullah, was arrested last week.

C. Husayn, profoundly discouraged, was reported to have asked that two more brigades of Iraqi troops be sent into Jordan to assist in maintaining order. The coup in Iraq, however, wrecks this plan, and Iraqi troops already in Jordan (one brigade in north Jordan, with one more in western Iraq about 50 miles from the Jordan border) might now assist in effort to overthrow the King.

IV. Should the coup in Iraq spread to Jordan, the Israelis, alarmed at the prospect of being surrounded by Arab states under Nasir's direct influence or control, might move to take over West Jordan from strategic necessity. As presently constituted, the waist of Israel is only some ten miles wide, and the Israelis have

repeatedly stated that they could not abide Iraqi troops in West Jordan and cited the fact that Iraq has never signed an armistice with Israel.

- V. The position of the pro-Western government in Lebanon will, of course, be further weakened. Damascus radio has already appealed to Iraqis whom it alleges are working with the Lebanese government to desert to the rebels there.
- VI. Iraq's allies in the Baghdad Pact have foreseen for some time the possibility that Iraq might withdraw, though not under these circumstances. Revamping the pact will be a main topic of discussion at the Istanbul meetings of the Moslem members scheduled for tomorrow.
- A. Meanwhile, the Iranian army is reported to have been alerted along the Iran-Iraq border.
- VII. The most serious ultimate impact of the coup is of course on Western Europe's access to Middle East oil supplies.
- A. Even though a pro-Nasir regime in Iraq might not move immediately toward nationalization of the internationally-owned Iraq Petroleum Company so as to avoid antagonizing the West too much while the regime gets settled in, there is no question but that this would be the ultimate objective.
- B. The fate of Kuwait, the area's largest producer, would also come in question. The Emir government had sought to bring Kuwait into the Iraqi-Jordanian union, but had been unsuccessful partly because of pro-Nasir sentiment among the Kuwait populace.

- C. The ruler of Kuwait may find it much more difficult to resist a pro-UAR regime in Iraq, and Britain may well have to decide whether to take drastic measures to protect its access to Kuwait's oil.
- D. Events in Iraq will further strengthen pro-Nasir elements in the kingdoms of Saudi Arabia and Libya.